



Beer Types

All malt beverages are rightly referred to as "beers," but there are two distinct types of beer: ales and lagers.

ALE STYLES

Until the 1800s, all beers were ales. That is, they were brewed with yeasts that fermented at the top of the fermenting tank. Ales are brewed around the world, but most of the distinctive styles known today originated in Britain. The British used hops in brewing by the 10th century, but the practice somehow died out and did not reassert itself until 1552, when King Edward VI issued an edict allowing their use. Virtually all ales now use hops in the recipe, though some use additional flavorings. Ales also are commonly conditioned or aged in the bottle to develop strength and flavor. Here are some of the major top-fermenting ale and beer styles:

Altbier

A German style of top-fermenting beer, altbier comes from the German alt, meaning "old." These light ales are cold-conditioned, making them more similar in taste to lagers than ales.

Barleywines

These brews are very strong (7.5% to 14% alcohol by volume) and intended to rival great wines in terms of depth, complexity, smoothness and body.

Bitter

British ales, usually bronze to deep copper in color, that are heavily hopped, giving them a high degree of hops bitterness.

Brown ale

A sweet, dark brown ale brewed in southern England. Brown ales in northern England are more reddish in color, slightly higher in alcoholic content and have a drier finish.

Cream Ale

An American invention, cream ales are usually blends of pale golden, mild, light-bodied ale and lager. Only two outstanding examples remain in this country, Genesee Cream Ale and Little Kings.

Golden Ale

Originally produced in the late 19th century to compete with the growing popularity of golden lagers. They tend to be light to medium in body with some hop aroma and a clean finish.

India Pale Ale

This style were originally created in the 1700s with a higher alcohol content and a double dose of hops (a natural preservative) to withstand the long and arduous shipment to British troops and colonists in India. The style is popular with many American microbrewers.

Lambic

Brewed in Belgium, lambics are made with both barley and 30% to 40% unmalted wheat. The mash is left to ferment spontaneously with wild yeast from the atmosphere for a night, then barreled for the rest of the primary and a secondary fermentation. Lambics are sometimes casked with cherries, raspberries or other fruit. Young lambics are dry, sour, cloudy, and similar in taste to a cider. Aged lambics are more mellow and settled.

Mild

The English term for ales that are only mildly hopped, and therefore less bitter than "bitters" or "stouts." Most are dark brown, though they range in color to copper. They're full-bodied in flavor, but have relatively low alcohol content.

Pale Ale

Pale generally refers to the color of the malt used to brew this ale. The malt is only dried instead of roasted, giving the resulting brew a lighter bronze or copper color than the brown ales, and a lighter, less hearty flavor.

Porter

A style developed in London in the early 1700s in response to customer demands for a blended brew drawn from casks of pale ale and brown or stout, Porter was originally a heavy brew. Once extinct, the style has been revived in recent years, and is made with highly roasted malt. It has a less pronounced hop flavor than other ales, and a slightly sweet taste.

Scotch Ale

In a country known more for its malt whiskies, Scotch ales are heavily dominated by malt flavor, but range in strength.

Stout

Stout has a dark, almost black color (due to highly roasted malt), and a rich malty flavor usually combined with a strong, bitter hops taste. There are a couple of versions of this type of ale. "Dry" stout, best exemplified by Guinness, is the Irish style, which is more "hoppy" in character and may contain roasted unmalted barley. "Sweet" or "milk" stout was given its name because of the lactose used as a nonfermentable sugar in the brew, giving it a sweeter taste. "Imperial" stout was originally brewed in Russia and adopted as an English style. It's usually medium dry, very heavy, and generally very strong.

Trappist

Only the order of monks bearing this name may rightly use the term Trappist to describe their brews. The order has five breweries in Belgium and one in The Netherlands that produce a variety of ales under the nomenclature. The ales are usually brewed with candy sugar, are bottle-conditioned and range in color from bronze to dark brown.

Weisse (or Weissbier)

Brewed from wheat instead of the more traditional barley, weisse beer also is brewed with top-fermenting yeast. Most are light and tart in taste with a bready or yeasty aroma, and pale in color.

LAGER STYLES

When bottom-fermenting yeasts were discovered, their advantages were quickly promoted first through Europe and then the world. Bottom fermentation takes place at lower temperatures, and the yeast settles to the bottom of the fermenting vat, out of harm's way. When the process was first discovered, many brewers produced the new lager during the colder winter months, and continued to brew ale in the spring and summer. As advances in refrigeration techniques took hold, brewers were able to brew the new type of beer year-round. Lager comes from the German word *lagern*, which means to store. The beer was not only brewed at lower temperatures for a longer period of time (anywhere from five to fourteen days instead of the two to four days for ales), it was then stored in cold cellars to undergo a slow second fermentation and aging process. The

new method of brewing became so popular that a wide range of styles developed almost overnight. Here are a few of the major styles:

American Lager

The largest selling beers in this country, including the leading lights, all fall into this rather broad category. The style is derived from European pilsners and tends to be clean and crisp with more carbonation and minimal hop character.

Bock

A German term for strong beer, bock beers are usually brewed for consumption in the late winter, spring or autumn. They can range in color from golden to tawny to brown and are generally stronger than typical lagers (more than 6.25% alcohol by volume). Versions of bock beer include "Maibock," a bock brewed to be consumed in spring, and "Doppelbock," an extra strong (7.5% alcohol by volume) tawny or dark brown beer.

Dortmunder

Technically, this is a beer brewed in the German city of Dortmund, but it often refers to the city's classic style of Export. There are actually seven brewing companies in the city of Dortmund producing a wide variety of beer styles with the name Dortmunder. The Export style is a beer that is pale and medium dry, with a little more body and alcoholic content than pale lagers from Munich and Pilsen.

Dry

Originally a style in Germany where carbohydrates were diminished by a very thorough fermentation (creating a high alcohol content), dry beer was popularized by Japanese brewers. The mild version brewed in America has a conventional alcohol content, and is noted for having no "beery" aftertaste. Although brewers felt the category showed a great deal of promise in the late '80s it turned out to be more of a fad than a new direction. In 1997 dry beers accounted for only 0.1% of all beer consumed in the U.S.

Ice

First introduced in Canada in 1993, this style has been embraced by most of the large U.S. and Canadian brewers it has been more successful than dry beer but still accounts for less than 4% of U.S. beer volume. There are several different methods being used for brewing ice beer although Labatt claims to have invented ice brewing technology. At its most basic ice beer is created by brewing at cooler-than-normal temperatures then chilling the beer to below freezing to form ice crystals, which are then filtered out.

Marzen

Originally a beer that was brewed and casked in March for consumption through the summer months, Marzen eventually came to be associated with one specific style -- a malty, medium-strong version of the Vienna style.

Munchener (or Munich-style)

This dark brown lager is full-bodied with a sweet malt flavor and slight hop taste that is more creamy and aromatic than a light lager. The dark color and malty flavor come from roasted barley. Most dark super premiums and imports (Michelob Dark, Lowenbrau Dark, Beck's Dark) are fashioned after Munchener beers.

Pilsner (or Pils)

Like Dortmunder, a true pilsner can only come from the town of Pilsen, Czechoslovakia. Pilsner Urquell ("original") is the only real pilsner still around, but most light lager beers are now modeled after this style. Urquell is characterized by a hoppy aroma and a dry finish, unlike most of the pilsner style beers produced in this country which have less body and character.

Vienna

An amber-red lager originally produced in Vienna, the term Vienna also still refers to the amber-red kilned malt that produces this style of beer.